



City and County of San Francisco Civil Grand Jury 2011-2012

NEWS RELEASE

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DUMPED IN THE RAIN AFTER DARK

An investigative report issued by the 2011-2012 San Francisco Civil Grand Jury finds the current use of “switchbacks” by Muni to be unacceptable.

A switchback is when a bus or Light Rail Vehicle is stopped, all the passengers are told to disembark, the vehicle is turned around, and the riders are left to wait for another vehicle. Muni claims to use switchbacks to compensate for scheduled delays and to reduce “bunching” of trains and buses, but Muni has no studies to back up their claim that switchbacks improve traffic flow.

Muni claims that switchbacks are common throughout the transit industry, and that they are used by transit agencies all over the U.S. and in Europe. But our survey of comparable city transit systems in the Bay Area, other U.S. cities, and in Paris, France, found that only one of eight used switchbacks in any situation other than an emergency. Other transit systems rely on a variety of tools to stay on schedule, tools that do not involve switchbacks.

Two transit systems we interviewed believed switchbacks would actually add delays to the schedule, because of additional time to board and re-board passengers. In addition, three transit agencies considered non-emergency switchbacks to be an insult to their passengers. In comparison to these other transit systems, the Jury found that Muni expresses a callous disregard for San Francisco passengers.

The Jury’s report recommends many alternatives to fix our transit without the use of switchbacks. Many of these solutions are already in use by comparable transit systems. Indeed, similar suggestions have been put forward by San Franciscans in Muni’s 2008 Transit Effectiveness Project.

The Jury urges Muni stop using switchbacks, and begin applying more rider-friendly solutions to the problems causing delays in our transit system.

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